Speech- by Charlotte Thomas April 20, 2013

**FORGIVENESS**

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”1

-Ephesians 4:32

Introduction to speech

Wow… I’ve never spoken in front of a crowd this big before, so I’m really nervous right now but I know that I was called to share my testimony and these words with you tonight—God gave me plenty of time to prepare this for all of you ladies. So… here’s hoping it goes well….

Video- “THE BROKEN GIRL” by Matthew West2

-play video…

-I want you to all of you ladies to close your eyes…

“How many of you have ever felt this way that this video portrayed, at one point in your life?

Ok, you can open your eyes now.

Did you know that you aren’t alone in feeling this way?

Did you know so many other women have been in your same shoes…?

Maybe tonight won’t affect you at all.

But I pray that it does!!

1 "Ephesians 4:32 Be Kind and Compassionate to One Another, Forgiving Each Other, Just as in Christ God Forgave You." *Ephesians 4:32 Be Kind and Compassionate to One Another, Forgiving Each Other, Just as in Christ God Forgave You*

2 "Broken Girl by Matthew West with Lyrics." *YouTube*

You might be thinking—

‘Charlotte, you have no idea what my life is like—you couldn’t possibly understand’.

And ya know what??

You’re right.

I don’t know all your situations… that’s true.

So I’m going to tell you *my* story…

And maybe sometime you will tell yours. Not up here (on stage) but to someone, somewhere.

And I will apologize beforehand—I am the worst story teller ever so… sorry.

But here goes…….

My Story

When I was 10 years old my father sexually abused me. He would call it a “game” and I would just play along, not thinking that anything was unusual or wrong with this. This went on, every day, for about a year. Right up until my parents got a divorce, because my mom cheated on my father with a drug-addict, named Steve.

The worst part about my whole situation was that I didn’t even know what had happened to me; I didn’t even realize what my father had done to me until 6 years after the fact.

I know this sounds insane, but I was so young and didn’t fully understand what exactly my father was doing. I realized what had happened while sitting in the auditorium, at my high school, during a seminar about, “Recognizing the Signs of Abuse”.

I felt so stupid for not understanding what was done to me at the time.

I felt ashamed, unworthy, and alone.

So, I tried to kill myself.

Well, obviously THAT plan didn’t work out the way I’d hoped back then. After my failed suicide attempt, I woke up in the hospital and a social worker told me that I would be placed into a group home for troubled teenagers. I was so confused and mad. I hated everyone and everything in the entire world.

I was sent to Looking Forward Group Home for Troubled Teenagers, where Helen and Mark Harvey were the house parents. Even though I gave up on myself, luckily, the people who ran the group home, never gave up on me… and neither did God.

It took me a long time to open up to Helen and Mark, but eventually I did.

It took me even more time to ask Helen about God, but once I did, my life changed forever.

Throughout all the counseling and help that the group home offered me I have really learned so much and come so far in my life.

While I stayed at the group home I: went through individual and small group/family therapy with a social worker, participated in community activities which helped me to form bonds with other teenagers who dealt with the same types of situations, learned about God’s love and how to remember this throughout my day, and conquered my fears.

Without the help and encouragement from the people involved in this group home, I would not be alive today. I know that God placed specific people in my life in order for me to move on from my past.

Forgiveness

I was able to forgive. This was a huge deal! Forgiveness is not given to everyone and not everyone forgives what has been done to them.

“Anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates his brother is still in the darkness”3

- 1 John 2:9

I was in THAT darkness for so long!

It’s crazy to think about where I was 8 years ago and compare it to where I am right now. Standing HERE… of all places!

If it hadn’t been for God, I wouldn’t be standing here (or be anywhere, for that matter) because I thought about ending my life so many times.

3 "Compare Translations for 1 John 2:9." *BibleStudyTools.com*.

Even though I’ve wished countless times that all of this didn’t happen to me—that my father hadn’t sexually abused me, that my mother showed affection towards me, and that I wasn’t afraid for myself and my sister—I wouldn’t trade it for anything now because my relationship with God is so much stronger because of it.

“When you forgive you must cancel all debt. Don’t spend your life paying and collecting debts.”4

- Joyce Meyer Ministries (9/15/12)

I want to spend my life living for Him! Not in fear of a person or hating someone- we are all called to love each other, as children of God.

I want to share my favorite verses with you… Galatians 3:1-5

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”5

This means, you can’t do it alone—you NEED God, we all do! If you try to go through life without Him you will fail! Simple as that.

We can rely on God at all times.

He isn’t going to stab us in the back.

He isn’t going to leave our sides.

He may not be standing next to you right now, but let me tell you something! IT’S NOT BECAUSE **HE** MOVED AWAY.

Every time we sin, hold a grudge, or won’t forgive, you drift further away from Him.

God forgives us of our sins before we even commit them!

You might be thinking, “how can I forgive when it hurts so much?”

5 "Galatians 3 NIV." *Galatians*

4 "25 Uplifting Joyce Meyer Quotes." *What Christians Want To Know RSS*.

My response to that is, “if God brings you to it, he will bring you through it”6.

Pray about it and tell someone. Regardless of the situation—abandonment, relationships ending, assault, attacks, people dying, home life and family, and/or addiction—

“God’s got a time set for your breakthrough. It may happen today, tomorrow, next month, next year. Even if you have to wait 5 years, you might as well wait with a good attitude so you can be happy! Who wants to be miserable? You can enjoy your life every day!”7

Matthew 6:14-15 says: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”8

Max Lucado said, “forgiveness is unlocking the door to set someone free and realizing you were the prisoner.”9

“Holding on to the past makes it impossible to look ahead at God’s wonderful plan for your life: it has taken me a long time to do that… turning your heart over to Jesus is the only way a spiritual wound can heal. Whoever messed with you, answers to Him!!”

Use the opportunities given to you by God… mine was the group home. That was *my* breakthrough moment.

6 "Timeline Photos | Facebook." *Timeline Photos | Facebook*.

7 "Joyce Meyer Ministries - Fenton, MO - Religious Organization | Facebook."

8 "Matthew 6 NIV." *Matthew 6 NIV*.

9 "Forgiveness Is Unlocking the Door to Set Someone Free and Realizing You Were the Prisoner - Peg It Board."





















